No. 3

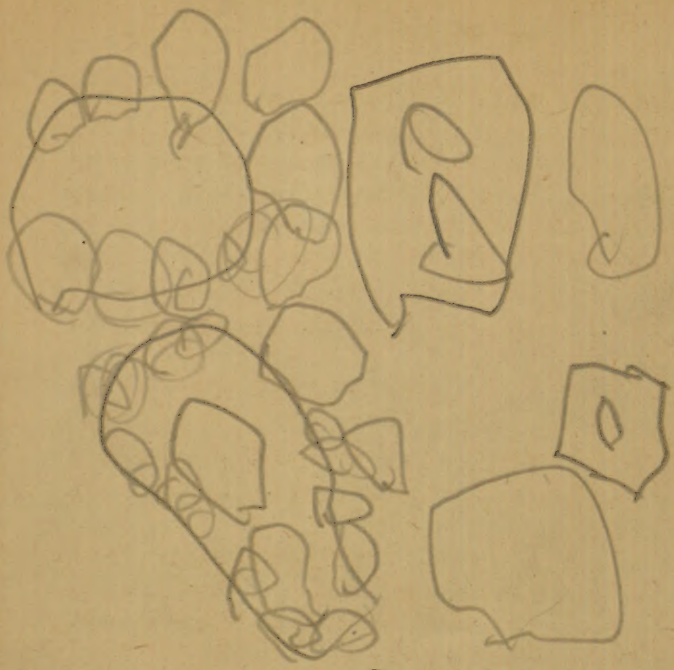
The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

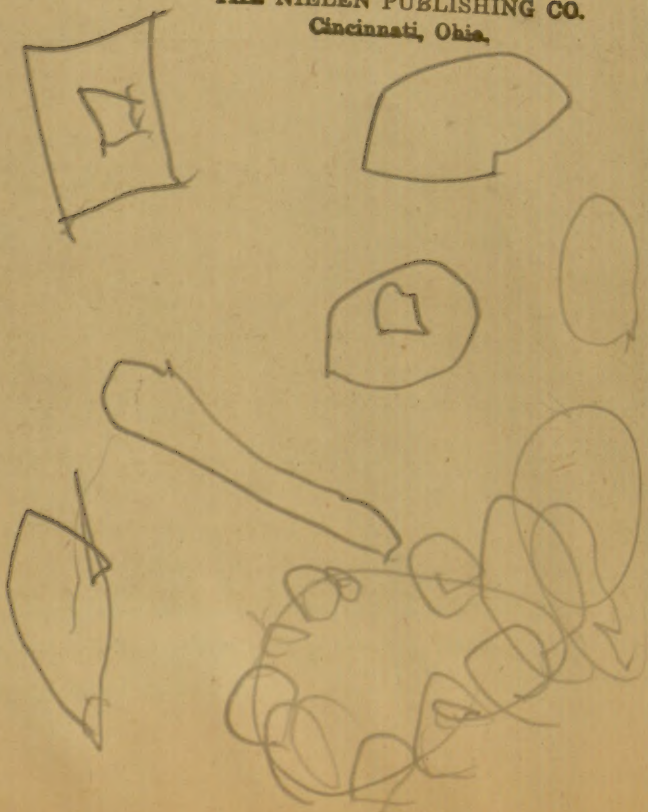
Price 10¢

"I want you to tell me who the scoundrel was who tricked or persuaded you to enter that State Street hotel with him!" the irate father cried.

R. of M. G., No. 8.



Copyright 1926 by
THE NIELEN PUBLISHING CO.
Cincinnati, Ohio.



WHILE MARIE continued to gaze at her husband with a world of pleading and longing in her eyes, the last vestige of misunderstanding and doubt was being swept from his heart. Gordon had come to realize how dearly he loved this woman, and how utterly desolate his life would be without her. Very tenderly he said:

"Everything is alright, darling. The danger is over, and the doctor said you'll get well again. Oh, it has been such a long, cruel wait. But now I am happy."

"Happy?" she smiled pitifully. "Oh, Phil, then you are not angry? You have forgiven me for——"

"Not another word," and he closed her lips with a kiss. "I was more to blame than you were. The past is a sealed book. We must never speak of it again."

Marie went back to sleep like a weary, but happy child. All night she slept without interruption. And Philip had his first unbroken sleep for weeks. When the doctor called he was surprised at the complete change in the patient.

"Great," he exclaimed. "By jove, we'll have you out in two weeks now, Mrs. Gordon."

"May I see my babies?" was Marie's first request.

"You may see them for a minute only," the man of medicine decreed.

Phillip brought Harry and Phyllis in. The scene which took place now made even Dr. Van Buren blow his nose. The children clung to their mother with shouts of glee, and finally, they had to be taken from the room by force.

Marie seemed none the worse for the experience. In fact she seemed stronger. Mother-love had once more come into its own. The tears she shed were tears of unfathomable joy and bliss. Her cheeks were aglow, and her eyes were bright.

When Dr. Van Buren warned her to be careful and go back to sleep, she smiled.

"Not until I have had a long chat with my husband," she said.

And she had her way. Long after the physician was gone, husband and wife remained alone together, their hands clasped. It was then that Marie made a brave attempt to brush away the last cobweb of misunderstanding.

She was determined that there should be no more secrets between them, and she told Phil about the flashlight picture. She told also how Alice Procter had come to her aid.

"I know I should have come to you, dear," she ended, her voice quivering with self-reproach. "But I was so terribly afraid. You were so dreadfully jealous of Jack Hoover, although you never had any reason to be. When he tried to kiss me, I——"

He silenced her quickly by placing a finger on her lips.

"You must not indulge in unpleasant thoughts, darling," he said. "I'll take care of Hoover. And I'll find this man Jones, too. I shall not rest until I know why that flashlight picture was mailed to me."

"That is something I can not understand," Marie responded. "Alice destroyed the picture and the plate. I saw her do it."

Philip reflected for a moment.

"What was Jones' attitude when he left after having been paid?" he asked. "Was he angry?"

"He seemed to be, Phil," came back slowly. "Alice Procter was a little harsh. Perhaps he resented that and——"

"No doubt he did," Philip interrupted. "It might be assumed that he developed more than just one picture. He mailed me one just for spite. But we won't discuss that any longer. I'll find Jones if he is still in Chicago. His blackmailing scheme is going to meet with a surprise."

After he had coaxed Marie back to sleep, he went down to the library and wrote a letter to Alice Procter and also a check for the amout she so kindly loaned his wife.

"I have always regarded you as one of my most loyal friends," he wrote. "You have shown your kindly interest in me and my family on several occasions. No doubt you thought you were doing the right thing when you loaned my wife the amount needed to satisfy a blackmailer. But that was a mistake, Alice. I should have been informed and be permitted to settle that matter in my own way.

"However, I don't wish to censure you, for Marie and I are deeply grateful. I am enclosing a check for the five thousand. I hope we may have the pleasure of entertaining you in our new summer home, Oak Manor. We want you to come and spend a few weeks with us. I shall be glad to show you an old castle

such as we dreamed about in days gone by."

It was unfortunate that Philip Gorodon made this allusion to the past. It was too personal. But it was a fatal mistake when he invited Alice Procter to Oak Manor.

Chapter 11.

LOVE'S GARDEN

BETTY PROCTER'S first brush with the rough side of life had not made a lasting impression. There only remained a violent dislike for Jack Hoover. And she vowed never to go near the Madison Country Club again. To meet that man face to face now would only serve to remind her of that one night. But the danger of meeting Hoover had been removed, for that colorful individual had received a quiet tip that the environment of the country club was no longer healthful to him.

Ugly rumors about Hoover, which were of an unknown origin, spread rapidly. And it was whispered that Philip Gordon was out gunning for Jack. He was still in Chicago, but wisely remained in hiding. He had no communication with any of his old friends, except Alice Procter.

So far as Betty Procter was concerned, he had performed the task imposed upon him to the letter. Yes, he had gone beyond that.

That Betty should become a full-fledged woman of the world under the tutelage of her more experienced sister, was to be expected. These two girls were living in a paradise all by themselves, with Alice constantly pointing out the fruit forbidden—fruit that was sugar-coated and alluring.

Alice quickly realized that all her younger sister needed now, was plenty of rope and a little encouragement occasionally.

She had in her possession a print of the flashlight picture taken of Betty and Jack Hoover the night of the last country club dance. But she decided to use it only as a last resort. As matters stood at the present moment, Betty would ultimately hang herself.

Betty had gone pleasure-mad. She was headed for trouble,

and plenty of it, if she persisted on her way. She had developed an extreme fondness for the opposite sex without having matrimonial inclinations.

She had learned to lie adroitly, cover up her tracks skillfully, and had brain enough to think of a quick, plausible excuse when pressed. But in spite of all that, she still was her father's favorite.

What seemed to be the climax of her young career, and the beginning of the end, came one beautful afternoon when she and Alice went out for a long drive. They passed through Lincoln Park and headed northward along the lake. Alice, as usual, drove the machine.

They had reached the open country, when the engine suddenly stopped. And it seemed to have stopped for good. No amount of coaxing and lamentations helped.

"What'll we do?" asked Betty in blank dismay.

"I'll run over to the farmhouse yonder and call up the Automobile Club," said Alice. "They'll send a man out here to start the car or tow us in."

Betty gave a sigh of relief, and watched her older sister disappear among the trees.

Alice had made use of this service on previous occasions when Betty was not with her. She got her number almost instantly, and the tone of her voice, as well as what she said, seemed to indicate that she was not a stranger to the party at the other end.

In less than thirty minutes the mechanic sent by the Automobile Club arrived. He proved to be a singularly handsome young chap with curly brown hair and audacious dark eyes.

"The same trouble, I suppose, Miss Procter," he said as he lifted the hood, and smiled amiably.

"Yes, I think so," returned Alice. "But before you get yourself all greased up, I want you to meet my sister Betty. Betty, this is Bob Harding, a good automobile mechanic and a very nice boy."

The young man blushed to the roots of his hair. He was obviously embarrassed when Betty came forward and held out her hand.

"How do you do," smiled Betty.

"I am glad to know you," Bob Harding said awkwardly,

forgetting to release the girl's hand. Their eyes were hanging on to each other for a long time. Betty seemed confused. "I guess, I better get to work," he added with an audible sigh.

"Oh, you needn't be in a hurry, Bob," Alice spoke up. "It is such a wonderful day. Let's sit down and chat a while."

But the young man, very much ill at ease, shook his handsome head.

"Too much work at the garage," he answered, slanting another glance at Betty. "I have to get back as soon as I can."

While he worked Betty never took her eyes off him. She appeared to have become enraptured. She stood unnecessarily close and watched his every move. She had not yet met his charmingly backward, elusive type.

"She caught fire," was Alice's silent observation.

It was true. Youth had attracted youth. The barrier of wealth and social rank was thrown aside. Love asks no questions, and imposes no conditions. Bob Harding worked deftly, in the meanwhile answering all of Betty's questions gently and haltingly.

"You know your business," Alice remarked, obviously well pleased. "You'll have the old bus running in a minute."

A moment later the first spark caught, and the engine began to roar. Bob Harding looked the car over thoroughly before he took his departure.

"I guess she is alright now," was his final verdict. "Well, luck to you."

He jumped into the service car and drove away. Betty looked after him regretfully. Somehow she felt a sense of loss. A feeling akin to desolation swept over her, and there was a hurt expression in her eyes.

"What did you expect him to do? Kiss you good-by?" Alice teased.

"Why, how can you say such a thing?" Betty reproved, her lovely face crimsoning. "You don't think for a moment I'd let a stranger take such a liberty with me, do you?"

"Oh, you might do worse things," laughed the older sister. "Bob Harding is an exceptionally fine chap. Too bad he is only an ordinary automobile mechanic. What a picture he would make in evening dress. You know," she added with a sidelong glance at Betty, "I nearly fell in love with him myself."

As they drove homeward, Betty grew silent. From time to time, Alice stole a furtive glance and noticed the quiver in Betty's lips.

"Still thinking about that handsome boy?" she asked softly.

"I am," Betty confessed frankly. "And I hope I'll meet him again. I never met a man who attracted me so strangely. He had such nice manners, and did you see him blush?"

"Well," drawled Alice, staring straight ahead, "I don't think he is as girl-shy as he pretends to be. I bet if you called him up and tried to make a date with him, he'd be on that kind of a job just as quick. Of course, I may be mistaken. There is only one way to find out. Try it."

"Do you dare me?" Betty cried.

"I don't have to dare you, my dear," came back. "Your mind is already made up to do that very thing."

And Betty did—the next day.

Because of the many noises of the place, the telephone had a special bell. It sounded above the roar of the outgoing cars, the splash of the hose and the hum of the electric battery in the rear. It was just three o'clock in the afternoon, when the bell rang insistently. Bob Harding heard it and paid no heed.

Then, echoing through the vaulted spaces of the big garage, came a strident voice.

"You are wanted at the phone, Bob."

Grumbling to himself, Bob Harding went to answer the call. But it was not the gruff voice from the Automobile Club, commanding him to rush to the aid of a member in distress. It was the voice of a woman, a young voice, sweet and fresh.

"This is Betty Procter speaking," it said. "You remember me, don't you? I met you yesterday with my sister."

Bob gasped. "Oh, yes, Miss Procter."

"Well, I am in trouble," she complained. "I want you to come out and start my car."

"Where are you?" he asked.

"In Jackson Park, right near the lake with the rustic bridge," the girl said. "You'll find it easy enough. I wish you'd come

right away."

"But, hadn't you better notify the Automobile Club first?" Bob suggested. "You see, we are not authorized to answer calls from individuals directly. All calls for help must come from the club. That is the rule if we want to collect the bill."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by a gasp of disappointment at the other end of the line.

"I'll pay the bill myself," Betty Procter exclaimed. "Please come at once."

"Alright," he returned with some hesitation, then hung up the receiver. He had a short conversation with the shop superintendent, then dressed with more care than usual, jumped into the service car, and was gone.

It did not take him very long to get to Jackson Park. He parked the car near the center of it, and began to search for Miss Procter.

There were a number of automobiles standing around, but so far as he could see, none of them were disabled. He wandered about for a while, then took the path to the right.

He came to a rustic bridge that humped in the middle, spanning a cool, green stream, bordered by willows. The stream threaded its way about a spot known as "Wooded Island," a relic of World's Fair days.

The little island lay silent, fragrant and exquisite. There was not a soul to be seen. Bob felt the hand of enchantment. Since he had, to all appearances, come out here on a wild goose chase, he meant to enjoy a few minutes of rest and solitude.

He strolled across the grass, ignoring the sign which said: "No One Allowed in the Shrubbery." He parted the branches and went down to the cool stream, took off his coat and cap, then flung himself on the ground.

Bob had scarcely been seated, when he heard a voice.

"Hello!" it said.

He was surprised to see Betty Procter trip down the slope and sit beside him.

"I saw you come and followed you," she told him, smiling.

"Where is your car?" he inquired, attempting to rise to his feet.

"Don't worry about the car now," the girl answered with

another smile. "This is such a wonderful spot. We don't want to leave just yet."

Bob Harding became confused.

He blushed much to Betty's amusement—and also admiration. How handsome he looked. What a delicious treat to see a handsome young man of his age blush. Her breath came a little faster, and she began to study him.

Then, without a word of warning, Betty began taking off her dainty slippers and silk stockings, and paddled her feet in the stream.

"You—you must not do that!" he objected, his fine eyes holding an expression of awe. "Why, if I had a sister like you who did that in the presence of a man, I'd spank her."

The girl laughed, glanced back at him over her shoulders, and wriggled her toes ecstatically.

"Please let me," she begged prettily. "It is so hot. And you don't know how I am enjoying this." Not satisfied with wriggling her toes, she began to splash and uttered a little scream of delight. "Oh, it's great."

Behind them, the leaves rustled. Then came a heavy tread and a rough voice.

"Say! Look here! Get outa there, you! What the——" It was a big policeman, red-faced and angry. "You can't do that. Get outa there!"

The girl turned her head.

"Now, Mr. Shannon," she said with a childish pout. "You wouldn't be so mean to me, would you?"

"Oh, it's you, Miss Procter," said the policeman. "Well, I'll be darned." He glanced sharply at the young man and asked: "Who is this?"

"He is a friend of mine," Betty answered, and began to dry her feet with an inadequate lace handkerchief. "You don't have to worry about him. He is harmless."

"But why don't you young folk come out and sit on a bench?" Officer Shannon suggested worriedly.

Betty Procter shook her lovely head.

"In Arcadia we don't sit on benches," she replied saucily. "Now go away. There's a dear. I want to talk to my friend."

"What would your father say?" persisted the policeman.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing that would hurt very much, Mr. Shannon. You see," she added with a roguish twinkle in her eyes. "I am growed up now. I am no longer the little tomboy you used to know. Please, go away now. We'll be out in a few minutes."

With an audible grunt of reluctance, the officer departed.

Betty finished putting on her stockings and slippers with slow deliberation, then sat unnecessarily close to Bob Harding. His embarrassment was deep and genuine. Occasionally he glanced at her face and caught her smiling.

"When you are ready, I'll look at your car," he said, turning his head.

"Oh, let the car wait," she returned softly. "I want to talk to you for a little while first. And say, I hope you are not afraid of me, are you?"

Bob Harding uttered a few unintelligible words. Betty started the conversation. She wanted to know when he first met her sister Alice, and a hundred other things. He answered every question like a witness on the stand. She tried hard to make him lose his obvious nervousness.

"I am beginning to believe you are afraid of me," she said with a tantalizing grin. "I thought you were a man, but you are only a shy, awkward boy, unusually tall for his age."

His eyes blazed at this.

"I am nineteen," he exclaimed.

"Are you?" She reached over and put a hand over his. He remained motionless. "Would it surprise you very much if I told you that—that I like you, Bob Harding?"

He glanced at her shyly. Her lips were provocative. And then, thoughtlessly, blindly, he suddenly flung an arm about Betty and kissed her full upon the lips. He kissed her as he had never kissed another girl.

Betty Procter did not scream, or push him away. She did not protest. She sat breathing rather fast, a tinge of scarlet in her cheeks. They both rose and stood staring at one another.

"I—I am sorry," he began to apologize. "I had no right to do this thing, Miss Procter."

Into the girl's eyes had come an expression yet a stranger. It was the dawning of love. What mattered it if this handsome

boy was only a poor automobile mechanic? Surely, he was a perfect gentleman at heart. His conduct and his every word proclaimed him as such.

"Don't apologize," she murmured. "Please, don't. The fault is all mine. And I'll be honest with you—I wanted you to do what—what you did."

"You—you?" Bob Harding stared wildly at her. "Then—then you care?"

"Yes," Betty whispered, then gave herself again in his arms.

Chapter 12

JEALOUSY

EVIL THOUGHTS intrude in an unemployed mind as naturally as worms germinate in a stagnant pool. And what a cesspool the idle mind must be that is dominated by jealousy. For when jealousy once diffuses through the human heart, misery becomes rampant. It corrodes every thought and blasts all hope of happiness. Alice Procter had tasted its bitterness, its incessant gall. The joy which might have been hers, was another's.

When she grew up into young womanhood and began to be courted, she thought that recommending herself to the affections of men was her sole business of life. She fell to practising all the little engaging arts so peculiar to her sex. In these she placed all her hopes.

She had youth. She had beauty. She had wealth. But she lacked character. Like a beautiful flower without fragrance, she attracted the eye only.

Disappointments were inevitable. Desirable men with matrimonial inclinations looked her over with quickly discerning eyes, then passed on. But Alice was determined that she would not be a left-over.

Her great chance came when she met Philip Gordon. Ah.

how she had loved him. He was the only man who had awakened a noble impulse in her. But, like others, he passed on and married Marie Carey. It was a cruel blow to Alice. She never survived this disappointment.

What mattered it if this handsome boy was only a poor automobile mechanic? Surely, he was a perfect gentleman at heart. His conduct proclaimed him as such.

Jealousy in its most virulent form swept over her. She then vowed that the woman who took Gordon away from her should not be happy. With devilish cunning she set out to undermine the domestic bliss of the Gordons.

She played the "old pal" to Philip. She singled him out at social gatherings. She managed to meet him "quite accidentally" of course, at places where he ate his noon-day lunch. She trapped him into making little mistakes and foolish speeches. And every word thus spoken was repeated to Mrs. Hendricks, that social scandal monger.

Mrs. Hendricks, in turn, repeated what she heard to others, and gradually the belief gained ground that the Gordons were not as happy as they appeared to be.

Alice Procter never missed an opportunity to be seen alone with Philip Gordon. She tried in every possible way to make it appear that she and Phil were still on the best of terms. And she smiled sardonically when it was hinted that they were lovers.

Of course, such gossip was carried back to Gordon's wife. Marie's faith in her husband, while still firm, had begun to shake a little.

Mrs. Hendricks had almost destroyed it the night of the Madison Country Club dance. She had predicted that Philip Gordon would arrive at the dance with Alice Procter. It had come true—apparently.

Alice Procter's latest coup had proven a flat failure. The flashlight episode seemed to have served to bring the Gordon's closer together. All she got for her pains was a nice letter of thanks from Phil and the return of the money she loaned his wife.

But the immediate future held greater possibilities. She had been invited to spend a few weeks at Oak Manor, the magnificent summer home of the Gordons.

It was a place ideally suited for moonlight flirtations and little love piracies. Here she could carry on her warfare against Marie Gordon under the latter's very nose by stealth.

When Alice heard that Mrs. Gordon had recovered from her illness, she decided to call on her—just a friendly call to offer congratulations.

She was received with the usual smile of welcome.

"It was nice of you to come," said Marie as she ushered the

visitor into the cozy living room.

Alice seated herself with cool deliberation. The first topic to be discussed was Marie's illness and the causes which led up to it. Alice seemed to enjoy talking about the flashlight picture and the subsequent blackmailing by Jones.

"I suppose you are glad that is off your mind, my dear," she said with a strange inflection in her voice. "No doubt Phil was shocked when you told him. How did he take it?"

Marie Gordon smiled happily.

"Like the splendid man he is," she answered with pride. "You know, my husband is so generous about such things."

"He doesn't seem a bit jealous of you," was the ironical rejoinder. "The average husband would have threatened divorce. Of course, Phil is so different. I don't believe he would divorce you, no matter what you did."

Mrs. Gordon did not like the tone in which this was said, but she did not lose her smile.

"You know, there was some talk about a divorce," Alice Procter went on, her eyes narrowing. "I heard that Jack Hoover was to be named in the suit. Of course, I did not place any credence in these rumors."

This time Marie laughed outright.

"Gossips always find willing listeners," she said evenly, and she looked her visitor squarely in the eyes. "I always thought you were above such things, Alice. Phil and I regard you as one of our most loyal friends."

Alice swallowed the rebuke without a quiver.

"I—I am only repeating what I have heard," she defended. "I do not gossip, nor do I, as a rule, listen to such talk. I listened this time because it concerned you and Phil."

"Well, if you hear any more of that kind of talk, just say that my husband and I are happier than ever now," retorted Marie Gordon. "There are no secrets between us, and there never will be." A note of joy crept into her voice as she added: "Within two weeks we shall be settled in our new summer home. It is a long ways from Chicago society gossips."

Miss Procter leaned slightly forward in her chair and began to toy with her purse. When she glanced up her eyes held malice.

"Yes," she drawled almost insolently. "Phil mentioned that

in his very nice letter to me. And he was kind enough to invite me to spend a few weeks at Oak Manor. Of course, you won't mind my coming, will you?"

"Why should I?" laughed Marie, then proceeded with the little fib: "I know my husband invited you. We both want you to come, Alice. There will be a good old-fashioned house-warming as soon as we are settled. We want all of our old friends to come. I am preparing a list of invitations now."

"Does it include Jack Hoover?" Alice inquired as she rose and shot a furtive glance at the speaker.

Marie Gordon paled a trifle. She rose also.

"Hardly," she replied, unruffled. "Jack Hoover is not wanted in my home, and I don't think he would have the nerve to come even if I were to invite him."

"Why not, my dear?"

"He values his health too highly," responded Marie.

Alice Procter sniffed contemptuously.

"Jack is not a coward, Marie."

"No?" the latter cried, her brows raised quizzically. "Perhaps not. But he is a very skillful dodger. He seems to have an almost uncanny knowledge about Phil's movements."

Alice bit her lip and remained silent.

The conversation was becoming a trifle uncomfortable. And she had suddenly made the discovery that Marie Gordon was holding the upper hand in the present exchange of thinly veiled animosities.

She wisely chose a more agreeable subject and finally turned to go.

"Well, my dear, I am looking forward with a great deal of pleasant anticipation to my visit to Oak Manor," she said in parting. "I hope you'll be settled soon."

Marie watched the elegant figure disappear with a vague feeling of apprehension tugging at her heart.

And for the first time she drew comparisons between Alice Procter and herself. She admitted grudgingly that Alice was a beautiful woman. She had a most striking personality.

And she found herself wondering if Philip had ever really loved her. She did not stop there. She wondered also about other things. Was there any foundation for the many rumors about

Alice Procter and her husband?

They had been sweethearts—everyone knew that. Marie's sensitive mouth closed and her eyes held fire. The first pang of jealousy began to smite her. Why had Phil invited Alice to Oak Manor without consulting her? Never before had he asked a guest to their home without her knowledge.

And once having given free reign to those unpleasant thoughts, she became immersed in them. They choked her.

"No—no!" she panted, fighting vainly against them, "I am not jealous of my husband. I never had any real reason to be and yet—and yet——" her teeth closed with a snap, "if I knew Alice Procter was trying to break up my home, I'd—God, I don't know what I'd do." Then she uttered a hysterical little laugh. "I must not even think of it!"

But she did think of it. She thought of it as she went to the nursery and put her dear babies to bed that night.

She thought of it when her husband came home much later than usual. She thought of it the following morning when Philip left for his office and failed to kiss her goodby.

> Marie had become a prey to jealousy, foul jealousy,
> That turned a love divine,
> To joyless dread, and made her loving heart
> With hateful thoughts to languish and to pine,
> And feed itself with self-comsuming smart;
> Of all the passions in the mind thou vilest art

It was a miserable day Marie spent. The elements seemed in harmony, for constant drizzling rain came from lowering clouds. That evening Philip came home tired and irritable. There had been some trouble at the office, and the kiss he gave her was perfunctory.

During the dinner he was taciturn and spoke little. He seemed to resent Marie's watchful glance.

"By the way, dear," she said suddenly, "Alice Procter called on me yesterday." Marie caught the quick flash in his eyes, and her breath stopped. After a pause she added slowly: "We—we had quite a chat."

"Oh, did you?" Phil cried, becoming interested and ani-

mated. "Alice likes to chat, don't she?"

"Rather," his wife nodded, watching him narrowly. "She told me among other things that you invited her to spend a few weeks at Oak Manor. She laid a great deal of unnecessary stress upon the fact that you asked her to come. She was quite happy over it."

"Yes, I invited her," Phil admitted, coloring up. "You—you don't mind, do you Marie?"

"Not in the least," she fibbed, and drew a deep sigh. "But I wish you had asked me first, dear. I don't like to be placed in an embarrassing position."

Gordon gave his wife a quick glance.

"How does my inviting Alice place you in an embarrassing position?" he demanded with a show of increased irritation. "I am sure I may claim such a privilege as the head of the household. Besides, she is your friend as well as mine, and I have——"

"She may be your friend, but I rather doubt that Alice has any affection for me," Marie interrupted quietly.

"What makes you think that all of a sudden?" he flared up.

Marie shook her head and became thoughtful. Her face had grown somewhat pale. Finally she answered:

"I don't know, Phil. I just can't explain. But I have the instinctive feeling here," and her hand lay on her heart, "that Alice Procter would harm me if she got the chance. She said certain things which made me think——"

"Nonsense," he laughed rather mirthlessly. "You have the wrong idea about Alice. She is a good sport. Her only failing is that she talks too much. But all women do that." He paused and glared at his wife. "Why, I believe you are getting jealous, Marie."

"Perhaps I have reasons to be. Now don't fly into a rage, dear," she pleaded. "I don't know whether you are aware of it or not, but you and Alice have been discussed frequently here of late."

"We have?" he sneered. "Well, what of that?"

"Well, you two were sweethearts once. I don't believe she ever forgave me for taking you away from her, Phil. I used to think she didn't care, but now——"

"Rot!" he cut in angrily. "You women make me sick."

That was too much for Marie. Never before had her husband

talked to her that way. She rose with dignity and left the room. But what hurt her most was the fact that he did not call her back and plead to be forgiven.

"He is not the same," she muttered as she walked wearily up the stairs. "Ah, I wonder if it is true what Mrs. Hendricks once told me. She insisted that when a man is cornered he resorts to angry outbursts to cover up his guilt. Why did he defend Alice Procter against me?"

Marie was dreadfully unhappy. In the nursery she did not find the usual comfort. Little Phyllis was already asleep, and Harry seemed less affectionate. All the world looked dull and dreary.

"I—I hope you are not going to be ill again, Mrs. Gordon," the nurse ventured timidly.

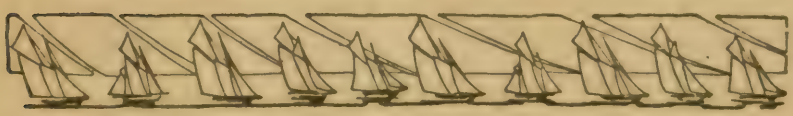
"Why, no," Marie said, forcing a smile. "What makes you think so, Annie?"

"You are so pale, and you look worried," the girl answered.

"It has been such an unpleasant day," was Mrs. Gordon's excuse. "I suppose rainy weather affects me a little."

After her mistress had left the room with the same cheerful "Good-night," Annie stood in somber reflections for quite a while. She loved Marie Gordon as much as any woman can love another.

"There is some new trouble brewing," she murmured to herself. "But no matter what it is, I'll fight for her."



Chapter 13

THE INEVITABLE

VERY PROUD indeed, were the bearers of the name Procter. They were aristocrats in the better sense of the word. Theirs was not a vulgar display of wealth. Neither had they ever been social climbers. Social distinction came to them as a heritage. And they were a very proud race. John Procter, the present bearer of the name, was perhaps more deeply conscious of the gift kind providence had bestowed upon him, than any of his forefathers. Family traditions were sacred to him.

No Procter ever contracted marriage without the sanction of the head of the family. Only one had been unwise enough to allow her heart to rule her head in the matter of chosing a mate for life. The consequences of this rash act had been terrible indeed.

Cecilia Procter, a sister of John Procter, fell in love with an actor and married him secretly. When the truth became known consternation was quickly replaced by indignation and wrath.

So far as the Procter family was concerned, Cecilia had ceased to exist that very day. She had committed the cardinal sin that no Procter could forgive.

As was predicted, the marriage proved a failure. When she attempted to return to the fold, disillusioned, broken in body and spirit, destitute and utterly wretched, she received a stone instead of a crust of bread.

Her frail body already ravaged by illness, she died in abject poverty and want. Not a single one of her kin accompanied the hapless woman to her last resting place. It was a frightful punishment for having loved unwisely and too well.

When Betty Procter allowed herself to fall in love with a poor automobile mechanic, she could not have done anything worse. And it would never have happened but for her older sister's despicable activities.

After her first meeting with Bob Harding, others followed. They quickly got beyond their depth in the sea of love. Of course Bob dared not come to see her at home, so Betty consented to meet him anywhere he suggested. There was a fourth class family hote

on State Street, which became their favorite rendesvous.

Both felt that they ought to be married. Betty did the usual foolish thing. She went to her older sister for advice.

"I know dad will never forgive me if I tell him," she said in the course of their conversation behind locked doors. "But I'll never give Bob up. I can't."

"Why tell him?" Alice asked laconically.

"But don't you think I ought to?" Betty countered with a suppressed sob. "You see, Bob and I expect to be married soon. He is such a dear boy. He thinks he is not half good enough for me."

"He is a fine chap," the older sister coincided warmly.

Betty's heart was sorely troubled. She and her father had always been such good pals. She could not hurt him if there was a possible way to avoid it. But her handsome young lover meant more to her just now than a parent's stern disapproval.

"You were always dad's pet," Alice went on persuasively. "I really don't think he would raise much of a row if you told him about Bob Harding, but," she added thoughtfully, "if I were you, I'd wait until the marriage ceremony was performed. Dad may rave, but he can't untie the knot."

Betty drew a sigh of relief. In her love-sick mind she considered this sound logic and good advice.

Alice asked many questions which were answered readily by her guileless younger sister. Thus she found out where Betty met Bob Harding, and a number of other things to be used in the future.

Besides her hidden hatred for Betty, Alice was coldly selfish. Betty was in a fair way of eliminating herself in her father's affection and also as an heir to half of the Procter fortune.

Betty seemed to have sensed what was going on in her sister's mind, for she said:

"There is only one thing that worries me. What if dad were to disown me and cut off my allowance? He might even change his will and cut me off without a penny. I couldn't stand poverty. Bob doesn't make a large salary, you know."

Alice smiled confidently.

"I don't think dad would go to that extreme," she answered. "He loves you too well for that. Of course, you will have to be

your own judge. Perhaps you'd rather give up Bob, and——"

"No—no!" Betty cried wildly. "I would not give him up for anything or anybody in the world. I'll die first."

Again Alice smiled—triumphantly, wickedly.

"Then marry him and take a chance," she declared urgingly. "I would if I were you. And if the worst happens, you can always rely on me. I wouldn't leave my only sister in the lurch. You may rest assured that I'll share whatever I have, with you."

Betty had made her decision. She gave expression to her grateful emotion by kissing Alice.

Three days later she was secretly married to Bob Harding. They agreed that they would live apart for the time being. As before, they continued to meet at the State Street family hotel, and there they spent their honeymoon.

Alice kept informed of everything that transpired, and the arrangement between the young married couple did not suit her at all. Betty had taken the mad plunge, and she must suffer the consequences.

Alice might have gone to her father and told him the truth, but she was far too shrewd to commit an act that might result in incriminating herself. There was a safer method.

And so it happened that John Procter received an unexpected visit one afternoon from Mrs. Perkins, a former neighbor and a notorious gossip. She was ushered into the room, bristling with importance. Mr. Procter looked her over coldly before he asked her to be seated.

His keen dislike for this woman dated back several years. She was the one who taught his daughter Alice to smoke cigarettes and initiated her into the fast set.

"Well, Mrs. Perkins," he said none too pleasant. "To what am I indebted for the honor of your call?"

"I don't know how to tell you, dear Mr. Procter," she began as she made herself comfortable in a chair. "I don't know how to beat about the bush, but I know I must tell you."

"What's on your mind?" the master of the house demanded tersely.

"It's about Betty, your youngest daughter," the woman went on, glancing about wildly. "Where is she at present?"

"Why, she went out driving with her sister Alice a few

minutes ago. What have you come to tell me about her, Mrs. Perkins?"

"Oh, the latter said with a little gasp, "I would never have believed it of her if I had not seen it with my own eyes. It happened last night, and——"

"What happened last night, and what did you see?" John Procter had risen and stood before the woman, a commanding figure indeed. "Out with it!"

"Well, last night," Mrs. Perkins continued, "after my husband and I came from the opera, we strolled along State Street. Suddenly I noticed ahead of us two young people walking together —a young man and a girl. The man—I caught him only in profile, was rather common-looking. He looked like a chauffeur. The girl looked like Betty."

Mr. Procter had seated himself again. He appeared to be quite composed.

His demeanor indicated that he placed no credence in anything this woman might say. And it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from showing her the door. How dared she come to him with tales about his Betty? What else was behind this?

"You say the girl you saw looked like Betty," he spoke in a slow, measured tone. "Did you speak to her?"

"No," Mrs. Perkins replied.

His eyes blazed.

"Then how can you expect me to believe it was my Betty? What became of the girl?"

"The man took her into one of those notorious family hotels on State Street," the woman replied, a little ruffled. "And it was Betty. Now don't glare at me as if you were about to murder me, Mr. Procter. Do you think I'd come here with an accusation like that unless I were absolutely sure?"

Procter snorted angrily. But he had been impressed.

"I can't believe it, Mrs. Perkins," he declared, not quite so sure of his voice. "Betty was not out last night so far as I know. I think she went to bed unusually early."

"Of course, you need not believe me," Mrs. Perkins retorted, assuming an injured air. "Just the same the girl I saw last night about eleven-thirty, was Betty. And there was something rather

stealthy about the way she entered that horrid family hotel with the man. She was afraid of being seen. Oh, I didn't think it of her. She was always such a nice girl, and——"

"Look here!" John Procter interrupted, his features white with wrathful emotion, "have you spoken about this to anyone else?"

"Oh, no," came back quickly. "I wouldn't have mentioned it to any other person for the world. It is too terrible. But I considered it my duty to tell you."

Then followed a long space of painful silence. John Procter was chewing his under lip. From time to time he glanced at the woman.

"If what you told me proves to be true," he said finally, "I am greatly indebted to you. If not, I expect you to make suitable apologies." He rose, strode to the door and back again. "I'll have a talk with Betty as soon as she returns. She won't lie to me—not my Betty."

After another pause he added, his figure growing tall and terrible:

"If Betty admits that she has lowered herself to that extent, she must take her medicine!"

"Please don't be hard on her," Mrs. Perkins murmured, her thin lips barely moving. "You know, we are living in a reckless age. There is no telling what our young folk may do these days. No doubt Betty got into the wrong company. She might have been tricked into entering that dreadful place——"

Mr. Procter silenced her with a gesture.

"Enough!" he cried. "Not another word. You have done what you considered your duty. I hope you will keep silent about this matter. Good, God, woman, you don't know what this means to me. Betty, my baby girl gone astray—I can't believe it—I can't."

His tall frame shook and he covered his face with his hands.

Mrs. Perkins had begun to feel very uncomfortable. She rose and moved toward the door. When she said "Goodby," she received no answer. With an ugly smile hovering about the corners of her slit of a mouth, she closed the door behind her and was gone.

"Then marry him and take a chance," she declared urgingly. "I would if I were you. And if the worst happens, you can always rely on me."

John Procter had dropped back into his chair, and sat staring at the floor. For hours he sat thus, suffering all the mental torments imaginable.

Then, at last, he uttered a sound.

"Betty—my Betty," came in a guttural tone. "No, I will never believe it of you unless I hear the horrible truth from your own lips."

Twilight gathered, and still he remained motionless. One of the servants entered, gazed at the silent figure in the chair, and departed. Darkness came, and then the sound of an automobile brought to a sudden stop. John Procter sprang up, electrified.

His hand struck the bell violently.

"Tell Miss Betty that I wish to see her in here at once," he said to the servant who entered in all haste.

A moment later Alice's voice was heard in the hall, then Betty's. The servant delivered his master's message in a whisper. The girl's face blanched. Something seemed to warn her. At the door she wavered for a moment, then went in to meet her father—and her doom.

Betty Procter remained standing at the door. One glance at her father's face sufficed to warn her. The peculiar glint in his eyes sent a quick shiver of apprehension through her body. And then, like a destroying flash of lightning, it came to her—she had been found out!

For a long time she felt unable to move. She was as one paralyzed, physically and mentally. Only one fearful fact seemed borne down upon her comprehension. Her father knew the truth.

"Did—did you want to see me, dad?" she asked, unable to recognize her own voice.

John Procter did not speak. He kept staring at the girl in terrible silence. She walked up to him as if hypnotized. His eyes were terrifying.

"Yes, I want to see you, Betty," he said slowly.

She waited, her lips quivering, her heart pounding. She watched her father as he walked over to the door, closed and locked it. He returned and took a standing position in front of her.

"Betty," he began, "I am going to give you a chance to clear yourself of a most frightful charge. Mrs. Perkins was here this afternoon. She told me that she saw you on State Street last night.

about eleven-thirty. You were with a man—a very common-looking man. Is that true?"

"Yes, father," she whispered.

"Mrs. Perkins saw you enter one of those disreputable family hotels with that man. Is that also true?"

"Partly. The hotel was not disreputable," she protested.

"Who was the man?" Procter demanded, his voice like an angry peal of thunder.

Betty's head lowered until it almost touched her breast. She made no answer.

"I want you to tell me who the scoundrel was who tricked or persuaded you to enter that State Street hotel with him!" the irate father cried. "I must know his name so that I can take the proper steps to punish him!"

She raised her eyes to his pleadingly.

"Who was he?" It was a scream now.

"My—my husband, dad!" The words came in a breath.

John Procter gave a gasp. The room began to revolve about him. He stood like a statue. Then he staggered backward, almost falling into the chair by the study table at which he worked. He grasped the arms of the chair, and when he could command himself sufficiently to speak, the words seemed wrung from him in a savage, agonized whisper:

"Your—your husband?"

"Yes, father," Betty admitted, trying bravely to summon a smile. "Bob Harding and I were married secretly, and I hope you will forgive me."

"What kind of a man is this Bob Harding?" Procter asked with ominous quietness.

"Oh, he is the dearest man in the world, and I love him with all my heart," she replied, relieved that her father had apparently cooled down. "But he is not rich, and he does not belong to our social set. He has so many admirable qualities that make up for that, though.

"And you'll like him, too, dad. I know you will. Of course, I realize that I did wrong in marrying him without your knowledge and consent. I——"

Betty stopped and drew a sharp breath. Her father's face had gone dreadfully white. There was a look in his eyes that

frightened her. She tried to control her panic-stricken nerves and sat rigidly forward.

And then, all of a sudden, she heard a stifled sob. It came from her father's dry throat. She sprang up and ran to him.

"Dad!" she cried, her voice shrill with pleading. "Oh, dad, I am so sorry. I did not mean to hurt you, really, I didn't!"

"Don't touch me!" John Procter shoved his daughter aside with a violent motion. "None of that now. Sit down and listen to what I have to say to you, Betty."

The girl obeyed mechanically.

"We Procters have always been proud of the name we bear," he began. "There was only one in the family, to my recollection, who disgraced it. And that was my sister. You know the story. Her punishment shall be your punishment. Without my knowledge and sanction you saw fit to lower yourself to become the wife of an ordinary automobile mechanic. That is something I can never forgive.

"Not a word!" he cried vehemently as Betty was about to speak in her defense. "I don't care where and how you met him. You need not tell me what type of a man he is. The fact that he took you into a notorious State Street hotel speaks for itself. And you, a Procter, went with him.

"Well," his voice was cold as the north wind in December, "you have made your bed, and you must sleep in it. You have chosen your husband without consulting me, and you must live with him. I want you to leave this house and never darken its doors again. And don't think for a moment that an appeal for financial help will soften me. You are no longer my daughter. Go!"

His finger pointed straight at the door. As he stood there, so tall and terrible, Betty began to whimper.

"Please—please, forgive me!" she begged piteously.

"Go!" John Procter's command was a hoarse shout. "I never want to see your face again. If you don't leave this instant, I'll——"

Betty, already on her feet, shrank back as her father drew near.

His hands were raised. The expression in his eyes frightened and unnerved her. With a low cry she made a break for the

door, unlocked it, and fled out into the night.

John Procter fell limply into a chair and wept like a child. In the room adjoining, stood Alice Procter and smiled.

Chapter 14

THE CHAMELEON

HOW SLOW time passes to the remorseful. A week had passed since that eventful night—a week of bitter remorse, a week of vain waiting and hoping, a week of yearning that ended in blank despair. Alone in his library, amid a litter of newspapers and mail, sat John Procter, utterly wretched. He sat forward, with his chin hugged in his hand, his brows drawn, and the lines deep about his mouth.

As he resumed the scrutiny of the letter he had just opened, he seemed to swallow something hard. The sun had gone out of his life, for the letter, written by the head of a private detective agency, informed him that Betty had been seen last in the vicinity of the Chicago River.

Minute after minute John Procter sat there, his hands tightening as though to strangle what was written on the sheet of paper—to throttle and silence the persistent cry of his own grief-torn heart.

"No, I can't believe it" The words were wrung from him in a hoarse whisper. "My Betty would not take her own life!"

But there was that horrible suggestion of the Chicago River!

The newspapers, as usual, had given the affair plenty of space. One of them stated that it was rather significant that the young automobile mechanic, Bob Harding, had also disappeared without leaving a trace. Another paper hinted at a double suicide.

John Procter had eagerly read every word, but steadfastly refused to subscribe to this theory, for if Betty had ended her existence in such a tragic manner, he was her murderer.

There had been little comfort in his older daughter's rather crude way of filling the void left by Betty.

Alice's utter lack of sincerity was too apparant She simu-

lated grief very effectively. She shed a few tears as she spoke feelingly about Betty's unfortunate choice. She even reproved her father for having been so "unnecessarily harsh" with her.

But on the whole, she seemed decidedly reticent to discuss the matter. Her attitude indicated that Betty had made her bed and must sleep in it.

When friends remarked about her indifference, she answered:

"Why should I keep on worrying about Betty? Other girls of her social standing fell in love with poor men and married them, too. My sister will turn up some of these days with her automobile mechanic husband, and I hope dad will forgive her."

Alice, however, did not utter her true sentiments when she spoke thus. No matter how the affair terminated, she was determined that Betty should not return to the family fold.

Her father, already at a ripe old age, was now weighed down with remorse and grief.

He could not reconcile himself to Betty's loss. If he should pass away, Alice was bound to become the sole heir of the Procter fortune, for the will stated that either of the girls was automatically barred from receiving a share of the estate in case she married without her father's consent.

Betty had done that very thing, aided and abetted by the astute Alice.

But the latter found cause for feeling apprehensive. Her father's constant grieving over Betty told her plainly that the terms of the will would be ignored.

At home, Alice played the role of a deeply worried sister and an affectionate daughter with consummate skill. But she became a different girl when in the company of her fast friends. She was like that lizard-like reptile, called a chameleon, which possesses the power of changing its color.

As the days passed, Alice found playing the comforter to her father more and more irksome.

She grew tired of hearing him bewail poor Betty's fate. His constant prayers for her return sickened Alice. He had even spoken about changing his will so that Betty would get her share if still alive.

So when society again sent its siren call, Alice responded

with new zest. It was pleasant to hear how she had been missed.

And then came the event for which she had made elaborate preparations. The Gordons, now settled in their magnificent summer home, "Oak Manor," were sending out invitations for a good old-fashioned house-warming. When Alice received hers, she smiled. It was by no means an agreeable smile.

When the long awaited evening came, Alice presented herself at the specified hour. There was a long line of guests waiting to be greeted by Marie Gordon, who did the receiving.

"Nice of you to come, Alice," the charming hostess said as she held out her hand to Miss Procter. "And," she added in an undertone, "I was sorry to hear about your sister, Betty. It must have been a terrible shock to you and your father. Betty was always such a sweet, demure girl."

Alice Procter bit her lip.

"We were shocked, of course," she replied utterly without feeling. "But we are no longer worried about Betty. She'll come back when her foolish romance becomes reality."

There was no time for further intercourse because other guests in line pressed forward.

Those already in the immense drawing room who saw Alice Procter enter, declared they had never seen a more beautiful woman. It was true so far as outward appearance went. Alice was the proud possessor of a tall, supple figure, with gracefulness depicted in every curve and limb of her lithe body.

Her decollete gown was pink and white. Her slippers and stockings were pink, and she wore a pink bandeau above her pink and white forehead. The only things about her that were not pink and white, were her dark brown hair and the shadows under a pair of keen and particularly beautiful black eyes.

The first one who came forward to speak to her, was Mrs. Hendricks. The latter surveyed her critically.

"You look in good health, my dear," was her comment. "Your face is as pink as your dress, but you smell rather strongly for my taste. Why do you use so much perfume?"

Alice laughed softly.

"Because I like to smell nice," she responded amiably. "And the men like hounds, will always follow the scent, you know. Doesn't my dress fit splendidly? I think it does."

Mrs. Hendricks scoffed.

"It's a great deal too tight, Alice, dear. You'll burst your hooks before this night is over."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," cried Miss Procter indignantly. "I believe you are jealous of my figure. Why don't you diet for a while, Louise? You could afford to lose a few pounds of flesh."

That was a cutting remark to make to a woman so dreadfully worried about becoming obese. Mrs. Hendricks gave Alice a withering glance.

"Oh, I am satisfied with my figure," she said icily. "It suits me. At least, I am comfortable. And by the way, my dear. The hunting season is closed for to-night. Every man present has his wife with him. That includes Philip Gordon."

Alice Procter colored. She was about to make a reply when she saw Phil Gordon rush toward her.

"Hello, Alice," he cried, seizing both of her hands. "I heard you had arrived. By jove," he looked her over approvingly, "you are good for sore eyes. I showed some of the folk over the place. Do you care to see it?"

"I want to see it," she returned promptly.

"Then come with me."

Drawing her arm through his, Philip Gordon escorted the girl from the room, leaving Mrs. Hendricks standing there with her mouth agape.

"Can you imagine it?" she muttered to herself. "I wonder why he is taking her alone. Well, I dare say these two will bear watching to-night."

But Mrs. Hendricks was not the only one who had decided to keep an eye on Philip Gordon and Alice Procter. Phil's wife was another.

Marie Gordon had never quite recovered from the effects of her quarrel with Phil during which he defended his old flame. There still lingered in her heart a vague suspicion that nothing could dislodge.

She went by the assumption that where there is much smoke, there must also be some fire. Too often had she been virtually compelled to listen to tales connecting her husband with Alice Procter.

Continued in next number

Tell Your Own Fortune!

M'lle LeNormand's
Only Genuine and Complete

Fortune Telling Cards

Instructive and Amusing

THE celebrated Fortune Teller M'lle LeNormand has foretold the Emperor Napoleon I., his ruin and the plotting of his relatives. Everything came to pass precisely as she had predicted. By special desire of Napoleon I., M'lle LeNormand presented him the cards from which the prophecy has been made, and also her written interpretation and instructions.

Amongst the Imperial Family Treasure this Gift was the most valued and treasured article.

The son of Napoleon III., having become possessed of this relic, could not escape his fate, however, being killed at an early age while battling for the English in the African campaign.

George Korn, native of Alsatia, a sailor and linguist, speaking German, French and English was captured by the Zulu tribe who had become possessed of the interpretations, instructions and cards taken from the body of Napoleon's son. Whilst in captivity, Korn often saw these cards.

Only these Cards and Nothing Else can be thy Savior

were his continual thoughts. Under the impulse of this inspiration he informed the chief of the magical power of these cards, which in possession of an enemy would cause dire disaster to his family as well as himself. Thoroughly frightened the chief gave this treasure to Korn and escorted him to the seacoast far from his place of captivity. After various wanderings and adventures he arrived at the German colony Kameron, where he secured a position on board a Hamburg merchant ship; and through these events we became possessed of the *Genuine Cards*, the handwritten interpretation and instructions how to use them.

M'lle LeNormand destroyed her cards and instructions before her death and had the ashes inclosed in a vessel of lead and which was laid in her tomb according to her last will, so these interpretations written for Napoleon I., and so cleverly saved by Korn were the only and genuine existing. These cards—Oraculum—have been tried in important events and are indeed *"Answers of Destiny."* For the believers it is a sacred treasure and in many instances an article of great value. Unbelievers can pass many tedious hours pleasantly in many ways, particularly in answering delicate questions correctly or otherwise. M'lle LeNormand's instructions in both English and German are complete and plain, and can readily be interpreted by everybody.

Price 50 Cents

Agents can make large sales and earn good profits. Very easy to sell. Enclose amount in postage-stamps and secure sample copy of terms and instructions.

You can order these cards from person delivering this book or we send them well packed, by mail, postage prepaid on receipt of price.

BARCLAY & CO.

P. O. Box 847
CINCINNATI, O.

Printed in U. S. A.